

Lutheran Woman

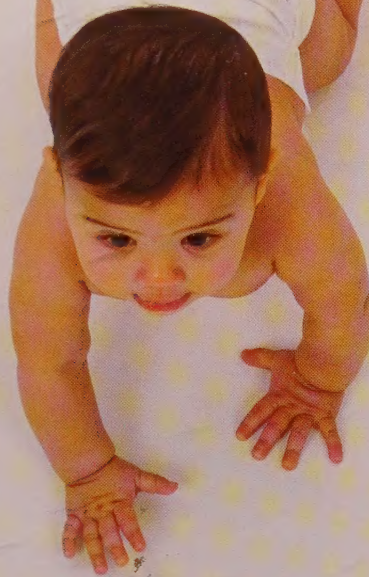
September 2009

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Encouragement



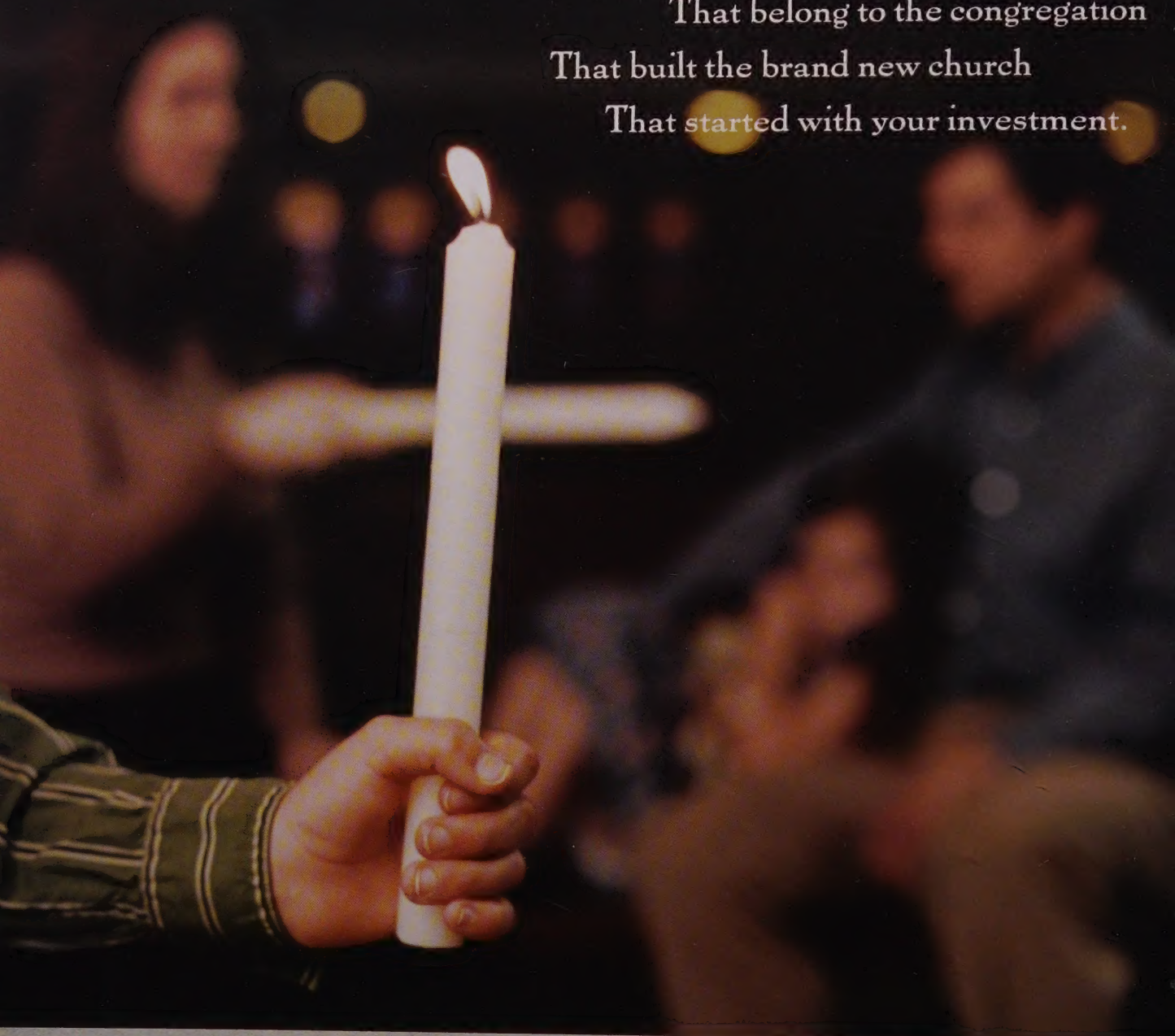
These are the lights

That shine on the members

That belong to the congregation

That built the brand new church

That started with your investment.

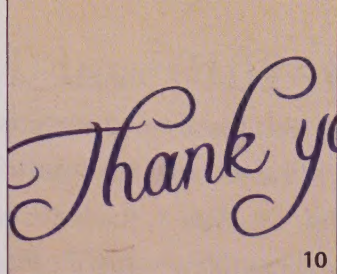


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ENCOURAGEMENT

VOLUME 22 NUMBER 7 SEPTEMBER 2009

Everyone needs a word of encouragement from time to time. As women of faith, how do we give—and receive—the gift of encouragement?

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VOICES

Share the New Bible Study

by Audrey Novak Riley

The new 2009–2010

LWT Bible study begins in this issue. “To God’s Beloved: Paul’s Letter to the Romans” is written by the Rev. Dr. Sarah Henrich, who teaches New Testament at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minn. Paul’s letter is important to our faith and understanding, and Sarah shines such a clear and appealing light on it. I’ve learned so much by working on this study. I know you will too.

We’re doing something new this year: Each session includes several “If Time Permits” discussion topics. Leaders can decide which of these topics will be the most enjoyable for their group, and which ones to skip or save for another time. Why did we make that change? Because readers asked for it.

You also asked us to continue posting free video introductions to the study and to each session on our Web site, and so we have. Free transcripts of the video intros are downloadable on the Web site—see www.lutheranwomantoday.org. Those who can’t access the videos on the Web can request a DVD.

As always, the Leader Guide (which is really an essential piece; it helps the whole group, not just the leader), Companion Bible, and promotional bookmarks are available through Augsburg Fortress at 800-328-4648.

The tradition of Lutheran women coming together to study Scripture goes back generations. Wouldn’t you love to share that tradition with more people? We have lots of ways to help you do that. We post the first session on our Web site

for free so people can sample it. Print out several copies and pass them around. We have brochures and subscription envelopes for you to pass out, too. Call the *LWT* office at 800-638-3522, ext. 2730 or e-mail lwt@elca.org; tell us how many you’d like and where we can mail them. We’ll send them out right away.

All anyone needs to enjoy the study is a subscription to this magazine, which is \$12 per year; order through Augsburg Fortress at 800-328-4648. Have you thought about gift subscriptions? That’s a lovely present for a newcomer, newlywed, or new mother. We’ve heard of circles chipping in to order a few extra subscriptions so that no woman goes without. And that’s yet another example of the faithful friendship that goes along with Lutheran women’s Bible study (you can read about how very much friendship meant in Paul’s world on page 9 of the Leader Guide).

I’m grateful to Sarah for writing this study and traveling around the country to introduce it, to my colleagues Kate and Terri for all their excellent work as well as shaped this study, to our video producer Brett, and to the dozens of other people whose work is essential to getting this study into the hands and hearts of the women of the church. But I’m especially grateful to Women of the ELCA—you—for your generous support of the whole endeavor. In another letter, Paul wrote “I thank God for you.” And I borrow his words—I thank God for *you*. 🌸

Audrey Novak Riley is associate editor of *Lutheran Woman Today*.



VE US THIS DAY

here's Room or More

Marie Reyner

et the word of Christ dwell
you richly as you teach and
monish one another with
wisdom, and as you sing
alms, hymns, and spiritual
ngs with gratitude in your
arts toward God."
Colossians 3:16)

"I love our circle!"

We gather, we laugh, we cry, we study, we pray, we eat, and yes, we grow in our faith. We met on September 11, 2001, when we especially needed each other. We meet when it's below zero. We sometimes go for a tour of each other's gardens just for fun in the summer.

When I heard one of our members say how she loved our circle, I thought how blessed we are. The really valuable ingredient is trust. We trust each other, and that opens the door for the Spirit to work and friendships to grow. We hold each other up in prayer and support each other throughout the year.

Recently our pastor suggested that we adopt a family in our church. We organized groceries and raised money for a much-needed furnace. Some years the circle has helped support the projects of my Woman to Woman friend Elizabeth Abebe in Ethiopia (see "Sisters in Christ," in the April 2008 issue of *LWT*, also available at www.lutheranwoman.org).

I recall my mother saying she thought that Bible study was the most important part of the American Lutheran Church Women. It continues to be the center of our own meetings, for which I am always thankful.

"I love our choir!" We were all chatting so happily together after two weeks away from rehearsal that our choir director could hardly get our attention to start warming up. The choir is my family's support group. Our fellow choristers are our close friends. Our grown children

feel the same way about the choirs where they now sing.

All four of our children have sung in choir at some time in their adult lives. They all sang with us while in high school and have often expressed their appreciation for what they learned through that experience. They feel that singing in the choir was one of the best parts of their growing-up years, and they still stay in touch with their former choir director.

We feel that one of the great ways to serve God is through music. It is such an important part of our week that we truly miss it when we are away.

"I love our church!" A friend said this some years ago and my heart rejoiced. She jumped in with both feet when she joined our congregation. She serves in so many ways. She brings people to church when they are grieving; she encourages relatives to come to church and sits with them when they do; she invites people to have their babies baptized here. She prays constantly and has served on the call committee, church council, and altar guild. I believe this is the reason she loves our church. She is involved and she is a reason why others are glad to be there.

Don't be misled: We have our complainers, just like everywhere. But we need to let others know when we are happy and fulfilled in our particular house of God.

Our congregation's motto is: "There's room for more!" 🌿

Marie Reyner lives near West Union, Iowa, with her husband, Franklin.



Signs of Encouragement

by Susan Greeley

The phone call was unexpected.

"Would you be interested in writing an article on encouragement for the magazine?"

"Of course!" I answered, grateful that the editors of *Lutheran Woman Today* believed

I still had something to say.

Just before they asked me to write, I had learned that my position at the ELCA was being eliminated and I would soon be unemployed. A writing assignment was

encouraging in and of itself. The editors thought I would have some insight into the subject because I was going through

a difficult time and was on the receiving end of kind and encouraging words from friends

was thankful for the work and for the topic. After all, how hard could it be to write about encouragement? As it happens, much harder than I could have expected.

Encouragement is one of those positive words that intends to give hope or promise. What could be more Christian than that? To live in the hope and promise of the resurrection is one of the cornerstones of the Christian life. So why did I have so much trouble writing this short article?

Part of the problem has to do with being the *encouragee* instead of the *encourager*. Most people are eager to receive encouragement in the form of positive reinforcement—the “Attagirl!” that we all need from time to time. But when the encouragement required is of a more serious nature, most of us would rather not be on the receiving end of the exchange. I’m no exception.

I’m conflicted about being encouraged. I know that I need the love and support of those around me, now more than ever. I notice how people go out of their way to let me know of their concern and am grateful.

Intellectually I know that this is the beauty of living in Christian community. But in my heart I don’t want to *need* encouragement. I don’t want to be in this situation at all. I want to be strong and confident and self-reliant.

In weakness and vulnerability

And yet it is precisely in our times of weakness and vulnerability that God has the greatest opportunity to manifest divine presence. When I let down my defenses and am honest about my own frailties, I find another sign of encouragement in the words of the Apostle Paul: “for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.”

In 2 Corinthians 12, Paul asks God to remove the thorn in his flesh. “But he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’ So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me” (verse 9).

Even Jesus was not a model encourager. I was stunned about how difficult it was to find examples of Jesus offering the “rah-rah” type of encouragement in the Gospels.

Jesus tells Peter to walk to him on the water, but when Peter falters and begins to sink, does Jesus say, “Come on, Peter! You can do it!” No. Not at all. He pulls Peter up and says, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?”

A little later in the Gospel of Matthew, Peter objects when Jesus tells the disciples of his impending trip to Jerusalem that will ultimately lead to his death. Does Jesus patiently explain God’s plan to Peter and offer him the encouragement and hope of the resurrection? Hardly. “Get behind me, Satan!” is

his response to Peter. Not exactly a shining example of encouragement. Or is it?

Different types of encouragement

Maybe it’s my limited understanding of encouragement itself that is the problem. I’ve been seeking words of comfort and solace, but encouragement can take many forms. I found that the library has entire books on the subject of encouragement.

In their book, *Encouragement*, authors Lawrence J. Crabb Jr. and Dan B. Allender say that encouragement is really more complex than it first appears:

Encouragement, therefore, must not be defined as either rigorous exhortation or accepting warmth. Both will be involved in the work of encouragement, but neither gets at the essence of what encouragement is. Encouragement depends on loving motivation in the encourager as well as wisdom to discern the needs of the other person accurately. The actual words may be admonishing, rebuking, correcting, reproving, instructing, explaining, sympathizing, reflecting, affirming, or self-disclosing.

When I look at Jesus’ example from this point of view, I see his words in another way. He is able to offer different types of encouragement at the same time. He affirms and

welcomes the little children even as he rebukes the disciples for hindering them. He applauds the disciples when they realize that he is the Messiah and then sternly instructs them to tell no one else. He explains the parables to them in private but leaves outsiders to struggle with their meaning.

The writer of Proverbs understood the different forms of encouragement as well. "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver" (Proverbs 25:11). I read this verse as an indication of affirmation, yet note the verse that immediately follows: "Like a gold ring or an ornament of gold is a wise rebuke to a listening ear" (25:12).

Other helpful verses from Proverbs include: "Anxiety weighs down the human heart, but a good word cheers it up" (12:25); "A gentle tongue is a tree of life" (15:4); "Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body" (16:24).

Recognizing encouragement

Given this broader understanding of the word, what are we to make of encouragement?

As Christians we are clearly commanded to encourage one another. Paul writes to the Ephesians, "Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who

hear" (4:29). The writer of the book of Hebrews exhorts us as well: "And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (10:24-25).

It isn't always easy to recognize encouragement; some signs can be quite subtle. I find that when I ask myself, "What am I thankful for today?" examples of encouragement start flooding my consciousness:

- for the outpouring of letters, phone calls, and e-mail when people heard of my job loss;
- for all the lunch and coffee invitations;
- for the former colleagues who call regularly just to check in;
- for an extraordinarily patient spouse who lives with my erratic mood swings and our economic uncertainty;
- for the congregations that pray for me on a weekly basis;
- for my extended family and their consistent support;
- for those willing to critique my resumé and help in my job search; and
- for the friend who refuses to let me stay too long at my own pity party.

Offering encouragement

What advice can I offer someone who wants to be an encouragement to others? Keep Plato's words in mind: "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a great battle."

Here are a few ideas:

- Show up. Often it isn't what you say or do, it's just your presence that matters.
- Don't let words get in the way. If you don't know what to say, be honest. Say something like, "I don't know that I have the right words in this situation, but I want you to know that you're on my mind and in my prayers."
- Actively listen. The simple act of allowing someone to tell his or her story can be powerfully encouraging.
- Don't offer advice unless asked.
- Don't try to "fix" the other person.
- Be honest. If you tell someone you are praying for him or her, be certain you truly are doing so.

Perhaps most importantly, don't wait until there's an obvious need for encouragement. Try to view encouragement as a spiritual discipline and make at least one encouraging gesture each day. Drop a note to an elderly relative. Call someone for no particular reason. Compliment a stranger on the way to work.

And always remember Jesus' final encouragement to us as he offered the Great Commission: "And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20b). 🌿

Susan Greeley served as producer of the ELCA's radio ministry, *Grace Matters*, for 15 years until the program's discontinuation last spring. She has recently joined Lutheran Social Services of Illinois' advancement team as director of development.



LET US PRAY

God Resting on Our Eyelids

by Julie K. Ageson

Debra Farrington, our "Let Us Pray" columnist since 2005, is staying busy with her new pet-sitting company and felt she didn't have the time to write regularly. Please keep her in our prayers. Julie Ageson, who has written for LWT many times, will offer her thoughts on prayer during the next year.

As I begin my first contribution to the "Let Us Pray" column, I write from my home in Moorhead, Minn., where floodwaters continue to rage up and down the Red River Valley of the North. Though you are reading this in September, I write in early spring. And I find it difficult not to focus on the chaos of record-breaking floods in this part of the Upper Midwest. Perhaps you remember the news reports of extraordinary community support and camaraderie—the thousands of volunteers who came to the sister cities of Fargo and Moorhead to build dikes and levees to keep the rising waters at bay. And then, to add insult to injury, another winter storm blew into the area.

Through all of this, I pondered this column and what might be gleaned from such an experience. I didn't want to trivialize the suffering or sentimentalize the stories of sacrifice and care, or perhaps worse, capitalize on a natural disaster by turning it into a story of good. I've struggled to make sense of so destructive an event. The raw suffering of so many isn't obliterated by equal examples of self-sacrifice and generosity. At the same time, the spirit of communal care, collaboration, and encouragement in the face of adversity is the best of what it means to be human.


This year's study of Paul's letter to the Romans begins with the theme of encouragement. The first verses of Chapter 1 resonate with words of mutuality and support—"I remember you always in my prayers . . ."—the very words shared thousands of times this spring—" . . . I

am longing to see you . . . so we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith . . ."—the essence of so many phone calls, e-mails, Facebook notes—and words we use again and again to express deeply felt concern and love.

All my life, I've felt uneasy about an undisciplined prayer life. At the same time, prayer is part of my daily life and breath. The great Jewish rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote a book in the 20th century about prayer. *Quest for God: Studies in Prayer and Symbolism* (Aurora Press, 1998) and a later compilation, *I Asked for Wonder* (Crossroad, 1993, Samuel Dresner, ed.) have accompanied me through many of life's challenges. Among the images I carry from Heschel's body of work is this: God is resting on our eyelids. Yes, God rests on our eyelids, seeking us out even when we give no thought whatsoever to God. God seeks *us*! God is with *us*! God rests on our eyelids.

Making sense of suffering and adversity is never easy. Paul's words in Romans 1 are filled with "God resting on our eyelids," words that speak mutual encouragement and strength. God rests on our very eyelids, present to us through one another, through prayers we cannot utter, prayers said on our behalf, psalms of lament and psalms of hope, acts of kindness and courage. We are held in the embrace of God, come hell or high water. God rests on our eyelids; we are not alone. Encouragement indeed! 🌿

Julie K. Ageson is coordinator of ELCA Resource Centers and director of the Resource Center for the Eastern North Dakota Synod.



Thank you ...

*Grazie! Danke!
Merci beaucoup! Gracias!
Koszonom! Asante sana! Tack!
Tessekkur ederim!*

Those who travel to places where English is not spoken often learn a few words in the local language. It is a gracious way to act. It gives a sense of belonging and respect to say “hello,” “good day,” and “thank you” in the language of the country we are visiting—even though we might have to think carefully when saying the unfamiliar word. Over the years, I have managed to learn several versions of thank you. Sometimes the word doesn’t just roll off my tongue, but I am aware that saying thank you is important, whether I am in my home, in a shop, in another country, or praying.

Every day I say thank you. I thank God each morning as I open my eyes and take that first stretch in the cozy, warm sheets. I thank the cashier at the grocery store. I thank the delivery woman for the package. I shout a quick “thanks!” to my neighbor as she drops a borrowed book on my front step. My husband and I say a prayer of thanks before meals. I do a good job of sending thank-you notes after dinner at a friend’s

Attitude of Gratitude

by Kathy Magnus

home or for a birthday or Christmas gift. Thank-yous are important.

My mom taught me early that thank-you notes were the tasks that came after receiving gifts. I recall sitting with resignation at our kitchen table with a small stack of thank-you cards that I needed to write, address, stamp, and send after my 11th birthday. Mom said that each card had to have at least four sentences, and my writing needed to be neat. I labored with the cursive: “Dear Aunt Millie, How are you? I am fine. Thank you for the pretty yellow sweater. I wore it today. Love, Kathy Jo.” My mother explained that the giver of the gift had taken the time to think of me in a special way and I needed to acknowledge the gift as a sign of my gratitude.

Attitude of Wants

I’d like to think that I live with an attitude of gratitude. But often I’m caught up short. Sometimes I think I deserve the gift and really don’t need to say thanks. Sometimes I think a gift should be mine and when it doesn’t come through, I’m a bit miffed. Sometimes I just forget. I’m clear that as a Christian I am called to be a person of gratitude for both the small and large

gifts in my life, and most of all for the incredible gift of salvation. I know that. I believe that. But I don't always give that thanks.

My prayers begin with thanks and then move quickly to my worries, needs, and requests. On nights when sleep eludes me, I pray. I intentionally count my blessings. I start with giving thanks for each member of my family and for close friends. I name specific reasons for my gratitude. But before I know it, I forget that this prayer was about my gratitude to God and instead I am asking God for all kinds of assistance. "Help me. Give me. Help them. Give them." I know that requests are part of prayer, but I think my attitude of gratitude more often than not morphs into an attitude of wants.

I need to be reminded that *all* of life is a gift. *All* that

I have comes from God. We are called to be people of gratitude. We are given helpful resources for finding and expressing our gratitude to God. The book of Psalms rings with praise and thanksgiving. Take out your Bible and thumb through the psalms. On almost every page the psalmist sings out in praise. Read a few aloud in an attitude of gratitude. My favorites are listed in the shaded box below.

And there's a song that has played itself in my head hundreds of times over the decades. Sometimes I find myself humming it absent-mindedly. Sometimes, when words can't convey the thanks in my heart, those words and tune work. I taught this song to our children when they were young, and now sing it to my grandchildren. It embodies gratitude. (See the box below.)

Psalm 100

*Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.
Worship the LORD with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.
Know that the LORD is God.
It is he that made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.
Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise.
Give thanks to him, bless his name.
For the LORD is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.*

Psalm 84:1–4

*How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!
My soul longs, indeed it faints
for the courts of the LORD;
my heart and my flesh sing for joy
to the living God.
Even the sparrow finds a home,*

*and the swallow a nest for herself,
where she may lay her young,
at your altars, O LORD of hosts,
my King and my God.
Happy are those who live in your house,
ever singing your praise.*

Psalm 47:1–2

*Clap your hands, all you peoples;
shout to God with loud songs of joy.
For the LORD, the Most High, is awesome,
a great king over all the earth.*

Our hymnody is rich in words and melodies of thanks. A popular Christian song from the late 60s goes like this:

*"Thank you for giving me the morning,
Thank you for every day that's new,
Thank you that I can know my worries can
be cast on you."*

(Arranged by Paul Abels. Published by Walther League, Chicago, 1967.)

Attitude of Worry

But it is not always easy to be thankful. The past months have brought difficult economic times to many. How does one sing for joy when the fear of job loss is hovering around the edges? How does one give thanks in song and psalm when the financial future is uncertain and the future we had planned is no longer reality? For some, there has been news of illness and loss. How do I sing given that reality? Some days I can't, and that's the reality. Some days my singing and psalms are silent and my conversations with God are pleading and fearful. But God walks with me no matter how rocky my path might be. God's promise never leaves me. Even in difficult times God continues to give gifts.

In our congregation we often sing this offertory:



*We give of the gifts we've been given,
returning to you what is yours.
Our talents, our time, our hearts and our minds,
you bid us to come now and dine.
We come to your table of plenty,
together the banquet we share.
With wine and the bread our souls now are fed,
your blessings we see everywhere.*

("We Give of the Gifts," Paul Andress. Used with permission.)

That's the giving side of an attitude of gratitude—returning to God what is God's. Just as my mom was clear that thank-you notes were the tasks that follow a gift, so does task follow gratitude in my life as a believer. How do I live out that second part of my attitude of gratitude? How does my thanks move from singing to action?

Attitude of Opportunity

While I don't always do it all so well, I think there are abundant opportunities to live our thanks.

- **Tithing.** We are taught that God expects us to give of the gifts we've been given. I grew up in a home

where tithing wasn't discussed. It wasn't optional. You just did it. In junior high, that meant 10 percent of my Saturday night babysitting money. In high school, it meant 10 percent of the income from my summer job as a telephone operator. I remember my first real paycheck the summer between my sophomore and junior year in high school. I endorsed the check, went to the bank, deposited most, put 10 percent in a special pocket in my purse and took \$25 to spend. It wasn't a decision I needed to make. The 10 percent just *was*. It is a life practice.

- **Notes.** In today's rapid-fire communication culture of e-mail, text messaging, Twittering, Facebook, and cell phone conversations, one way of living out gift and task might be to actually write a note (on paper!) to say thank you for a kindness or for something you have observed about someone. Ever think of writing a note to your aunt or your nephew? Or someone who has brought you great joy with their music at worship? Or young people in your life whom you could affirm for their wise choices or compassion or hard work?
- **Needs.** What are the needs in your community for volunteers? Are there food banks that need help shelving or a school that could benefit from your time each week to read to a kindergarten class?
- **Affirmation.** Compliment a young mother on her job of parenting or maybe even go the extra mile and offer her a night of free babysitting!
- **Friendship.** Ask your pastor if there is someone in the congregation who is lonely and would appreciate a visit or an invitation to the coffee shop for a latte, a scone, and conversation.

The funny thing about this task stuff is that carrying through with it almost always becomes another gift! An attitude of gratitude multiplies all over the place. Gift and task and task and gift. God's gracious goodness to us.



*So what am I
thankful for today?
Oh, my list is long.*

Some of the things I'm thankful for are:

- The laughter of grandchildren: Jackson, Meron, Ben, Zach, and Josh
- My grandma's banana bread recipe
- Photo albums that remind me of people and places I love
- Music that soothes, energizes, and makes me weep or smile
- Sunday morning worship in my congregation
- Picnics, woodsmoke, and s'mores
- Results of a good mammogram
- Family stories
- A friend's letter or e-mail update
- Travel to faraway places
- Bible verses and hymns I know by heart
- Phone calls from my children
- Sleepy Saturday mornings
- Adult children who are really cool people
- Tomatoes on the vine
- The smell of a brand new book, or a library full of books
- A blank piece of paper and a new pen
- An elderly hand gripping mine
- Warm sun on my face

Gift and task. An attitude of gratitude. Thanks be to God!

Kathy Magnus served as the vice president of the ELCA from 1991 to 1997 and as the North America director for the Lutheran World Federation from 2001 to 2007. She and her husband, Richard, are retired and live in the Twin Cities. She is Nana to five grandchildren.



CALENDAR NOTES

September

compiled by Audrey Novak Riley
from sources including the Lutheran
Study Bible, Evangelical Lutheran
Worship (ELW), Sundays and Sea-
sons, and Lutheran Book
of Worship (LBW), published by
Augsburg Fortress, Publishers
(www.augsburgfortress.org)

September

Each Sunday this month, we hear from the letter of James. Tradition has it that the author is James of Jerusalem, brother of Jesus and leader of the Jewish Christians in and around Jerusalem until his martyrdom in the year 62. Scholars now see this letter as a later work that carries on the memory and thought of this hero of the faith. Borrowing another author's name was common in that time and place, and takes nothing away from the inspired text. Scripture and tradition agree that James was a deeply faithful leader, steeped in Scripture, honoring both his religious heritage and the teachings of his brother Jesus.

6 14th Sunday after Pentecost

Today's passage from the letter of James gives us the most familiar part of this epistle: "Faith without works is dead." The *Lutheran Study Bible* explains: "We are new creations in Christ, and God is at work in us to bring our 'will' and our 'work' in line with the model of Jesus' own life. . . . Faith and works are both signs of a confident and unwavering trust in the power of God's wisdom in us." Today's texts are Isaiah 35:4–7a; Psalm 146; James 2:1–10, [11–13,] 14–17; Mark 7:24–37.

13 15th Sunday after Pentecost

Today's passage from the letter of James is full of wisdom we can all take to heart. (Do you know anyone who would benefit from reading verse 3:2a? I do. There she is in the mirror right now.) The texts

appointed for today are Isaiah 50:4–9a; Psalm 116:1–9; James 3:1–12; Mark 8:27–38.

14 Holy Cross Day

In about the year 325, the emperor sent his elderly mother Helena to the Holy Land to supervise the building of churches at the sites of Christ's life. Tradition tells us that Helena found not only the tomb of Christ but also the true cross during this expedition; the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre was built over her discovery and dedicated on this date in about 336. The passages appointed for today are Numbers 21:4b–9; Psalm 98:1–4 or Psalm 78:1–2, 34–38; 1 Corinthians 1:18–24; John 3:13–17.

17 Hildegard, Abbess of Bingen

When Hildegard was about eight years old, her noble parents sent her to the nuns to be educated. Abbess Jutta (who was a countess) taught Hildegard and other girls of wealthy families to read and write, to sing the daily prayers of the Benedictine office, and probably to play a musical instrument. Both Jutta and Hildegard were visionaries, which attracted many followers, and when Jutta died in 1136, the sisters elected Hildegard their abbess. Her visions continued, and at the age of 42, she received a vision that told her to write down what she saw and heard. She understood that as a prophetic call and began to write. She considered her three theological works to be divinely inspired. She also wrote a drama now considered the first "mystery

lay,” at least 70 musical compositions, medical treatises, biographies of saints, hundreds of letters, and much more. She died on this date in 1179.

16th Sunday after Pentecost

James’ words about envy and ambition in today’s second reading sound like they’re drawn from experience, don’t they? Today’s texts are Jeremiah 11:18–20 or Wisdom 1:16–2:1, 2–22; Psalm 54; James 3:13–4:3, 7–8a; Mark 9:30–37.

Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist

The *Lutheran Study Bible* tells us that the Gospel attributed to Matthew was written down about the year 85, possibly in Syria or Galilee. Scholars suggest that the tax collector may not have been the one who held the pen (his name was attached to this Gospel in the second century), but the call story in

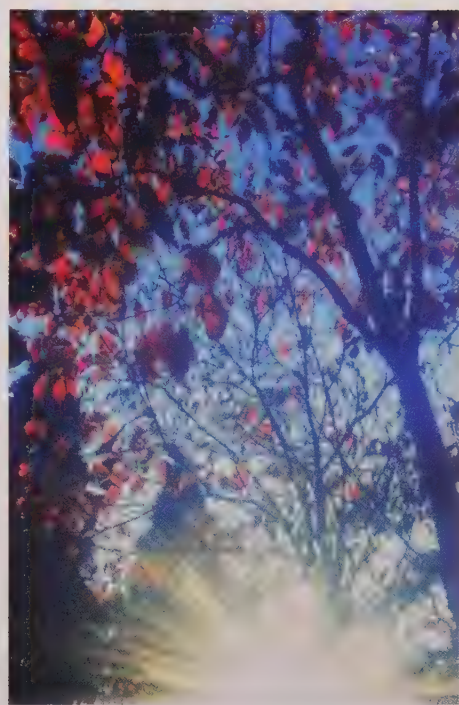
today’s passage seems to come from his own joyful memory, doesn’t it? The texts appointed for today are Ezekiel 2:8–3:11; Psalm 119:33–40; Ephesians 2:4–10; Matthew 9:9–13.

17th Sunday after Pentecost

In today’s second reading, we have the last part of the letter of James. Here we are told about the power of prayer: “The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective.” Thanks be to God! The texts appointed for today are Numbers 11:4–6, 10–16, 24–29; Psalm 19:7–14; James 5:13–20; Mark 9:38–50.

Michael and All Angels

Angels are God’s messengers throughout Scripture, and the first words out of their mouths are almost always “Don’t be afraid.” They must be pretty startling characters if they have to say that every time, don’t you think? But that



loving word of reassurance, “Don’t be afraid,” makes it possible for the listener to take in the message. What lesson can we take from the angels’ constant reassurance? The texts appointed for today are Daniel 10:10–14; 12:1–3; Psalm 103:1–5, 20–22; Revelation 12:7–12; Luke 10:17–20.



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WHEN IN ROME

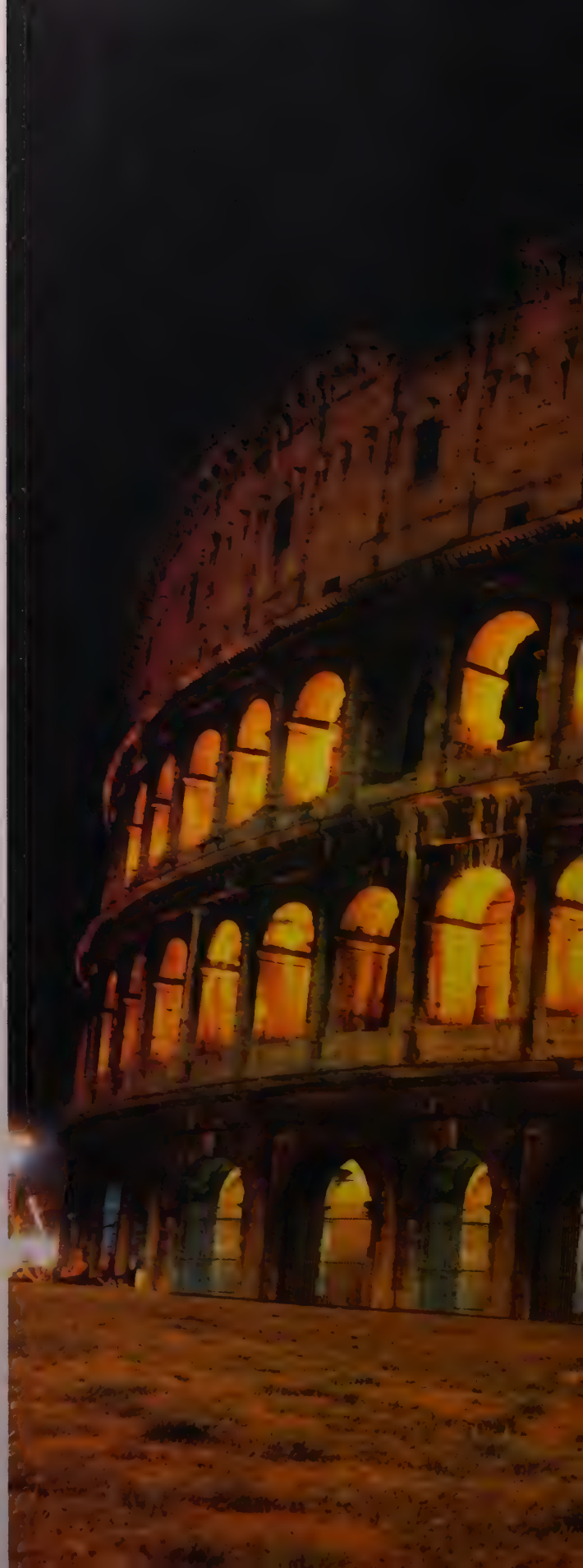
by Joy A. Schroeder

In Romans 16:1, Paul commends the deacon Phoebe to his readers. This woman, a leader of the church at Cenchrae in Greece, probably carried Paul's letter to Rome, delivering it to the Christians there. What was Rome like when Paul's letter arrived? Who were these early Roman Christians? What did they think of Paul, that outspoken fellow who called himself "apostle to the Gentiles"? Let us imagine what Phoebe experienced when she made her visit to Rome, sometime in the mid-50s, in the first century A.D.

SIGHTS, SOUNDS, AND SMELLS OF THE CITY

Rome was a busy, crowded city. The Roman Forum, where people conducted business, bustled with activity. There you could consult a lawyer about an upcoming court case. Or you could listen to poets reciting their compositions to an appreciative—or rudely critical—audience. The marketplace sold daily necessities such as food and pottery, as well as exotic jewelry and trinkets from all over the known world.

Visitors admired the elegant temples and magnificent public buildings surrounding the Forum. These structures were richly decorated with marble and supported by perfectly proportioned columns. (Phoebe, of course, would have stayed away from the temples dedicated to Roman gods.) Though many





parts of Rome were beautiful, other sections were slums, blighted with decrepit buildings. The whole city was constantly under construction. Pedestrians had to step around scaffolding. When crossing the street, they needed to pay attention so they wouldn't be run over by mule-drawn carts transporting building supplies to construction sites. (Roman drivers then were probably just as menacing as their descendants today.)

A visitor like Phoebe might have found the sheer numbers of people overwhelming. More than a million people lived tightly packed together in Rome, a city more densely populated than modern-day Kolkata (Calcutta).

There was an enormous immigrant population. People from all over the known world settled in Rome. People greeted one another in Latin, Greek, and foreign languages that the Romans considered "barbarian." Slaves and poorer people usually wore brown wool tunics. Wealthy men wore white tunic-like garments. They donned togas for formal occasions. Women wore long draped dresses decorated with colorful trim.

The more pleasant smells of the city included bread from the bakeries and delicious food sold by outdoor vendors and snack bars. As you walked to work, you could stop at a food stall and pick up a fresh

roll for breakfast. (Ancient Rome had its own version of fast food.) Some smells were less appealing, such as the sweat of workers on a hot day. The odor outside leather-tanning and cloth-dyeing workshops was hideous, since tanners and cloth dyers used human urine to prepare the leather and fabric.

Romans often complained about how noisy nights were. The emperor didn't want a lot of cart traffic during the day when people were walking, shopping, and conducting business, so deliveries to shops were made at night or during the pre-dawn hours. Kept awake by the clatter of mule-drawn carts and the boisterous shouts of delivery men, a resident could find it very hard to sleep, especially on a hot night.

LIVING "AS THE ROMANS DO"

Paul wrote his letter to the Romans in the Greek language. Most of the first Christians in Rome were Greek-speaking immigrants from the eastern parts of the Roman Empire. Latin was not their mother tongue, but they would have learned enough of that language to get along and do their work. Some Christians were Jews who had come to believe in Jesus. Others were converts from the Greek and Roman religions, which worshiped a variety of gods and goddesses. The earliest Roman Christians were not rich. The major-

ity of the people in Paul's audience may have been slaves or freed persons (former slaves who were now free, but still low in social status).

Wealthy and privileged people preferred to live in gracious, elegant villas on one of Rome's seven hills, where they could enjoy their gardens and atriums (open-roofed courtyards). Poorer people, especially immigrants, had to live in the swampy lowlands. Archaeologists and historians think that the first Roman Christians resided in a very poor section of the city called Trastevere. It was a damp, unhealthy slum, close to the Tiber River. A lot of the smelly leather-tanning workshops were located there.

Almost all Roman citizens and slaves dwelt in tiny apartments in one of the many enormous tenement buildings. These giant tenements (called *insulae* or "islands") were four or five stories high. The buildings were not only enormous, they were ugly and they were so poorly constructed that they were always at risk of collapsing. They were also fire hazards.

Apartments were cold during the winter and stiflingly hot in the summer, especially on the top floors. The poorly ventilated apartments could be smoky when people cooked their meals indoors on a charcoal fire. There was no air conditioning, central heating, or plumbing. (Rome had some sophis-

ticated public latrines, where water channels carried away the waste. At home in the tenements, however, people used chamber pots and emptied them out the window. Or they used a small "closet" under the stairs with a container that needed to be emptied regularly.)

In our own day, a penthouse apartment is often the best place in a building. In Rome it was the reverse. There were no elevators. People unlucky enough to live on the top floor had to climb many stairs. A well-to-do family could rent spacious multi-room apartments on the first or second floor of a tenement. Wealthy apartment dwellers hired artists to paint beautiful outdoor scenes on their walls to make them feel like they were in the country! Ground floor spaces were often rented to business owners for stores and workshops.

Since 90 percent of the population of Rome lived in apartments in tenement buildings, it is likely that most of the earliest Christians lived and worshiped in such settings. We don't know how many Christians lived in Rome when Paul sent his letter, but there were a number of groups meeting separately. While there were synagogues for Jews and beautiful temples to the Roman gods, there were no church buildings for Christians yet. There was no single place where all Christians in the city could meet together.

They had to make do with the space they had, meeting in small groups.

PRISCA AND AQUILA'S TENT SHOP

In Romans 16:3–5, Paul greets a congregation meeting in the home of Prisca and Aquila, who were tentmakers (Acts 18:1–3). Prisca and Aquila probably rented workshop space on the ground floor of a tenement. They would have slept in a smaller room in the back of the store and used the large front room for their work. There they would take customer orders, draw patterns, cut the material (canvas, linen, or leather) for tents and awnings, and sew the pieces together. Most tentmakers in Rome kept busy making awnings for homeowners, shopkeepers, outdoor vendors, and market stalls. In sunny Rome, everyone wanted shade.

Since their workshop was more spacious than most single-family apartments, it may have been used for worship gatherings. Their tent shop may have been one of the first storefront churches! Some 15 to 20 people would fit. Worshipers could sit on benches and stools. Others might have sat on stacks of fabric functioning as makeshift furniture. Tools and works in progress would be cleared away to make room for the guests. Perhaps work tables were used for the food, including bread and wine for the Lord's Supper. When early Christians gathered,

they often met at night and shared a meal. Imagine the flickering lights of the oil lamps as the community prayed and sang hymns together.

Christianity was not a legal religion in Rome. Christians had to worship in secret. Romans were suspicious of new religions, especially those that came from the east. Judaism was tolerated as an ancient religion. But the followers of Jesus seemed to resemble some of the secretive religions—such as worship of the Egyptian goddess Isis. However, as Christians met for worship, neighbors and passersby probably assumed that their gatherings were ordinary dinner parties.

So many things in Rome would have been unfamiliar to Phoebe. Back in her home town of Cenchrae and when she visited the church in nearby Corinth, Phoebe was probably accustomed to the congregation gathering in spacious homes, where 40 worshipers could meet together. The believers would have assembled in the dining room and adjoining atrium. The apostle calls Phoebe his “benefactor” (Romans 16:2), so Bible scholars think she had higher social status than Paul. In ancient times, rich people were expected to be benefactors (patrons) of those who had less. Perhaps she was wealthy and hosted worship services in her own home, which might have been decorated with artistically painted walls (frescoes)

and the beautiful multi-colored mosaic floors that were popular in Corinth. In Rome, as she visited the different churches there, Phoebe would have found much humbler accommodations.

READING PAUL'S LETTER

Since most people at that time were illiterate, someone would have read Paul's letter aloud to the people gathered in the various house churches in Rome. How would the Romans have responded to Paul's letter? Some of the listeners already knew Paul. They were probably happy to hear from their dear brother in Christ and eager to hear his news from Phoebe.

Others may have been suspicious, wondering what the apostle wanted from them. Paul said he hoped to stop in Rome on his way to a mission trip to Spain (Romans 15:22–24). Would he overstay his welcome and put a strain on the community's resources? Was he going to ask them for money?

Paul had strong opinions and was often controversial. He sometimes got into conflict with Christians who thought that believers should follow such Jewish rules as circumcision and the food laws. Would he stir up trouble in their city? However, some listeners no doubt looked forward to Paul's upcoming visit, excited about his plans for evangelism in Spain.

The people listening to Paul's letter expected him to come soon, maybe in a few months. Perhaps they began making plans with Phoebe to help the apostle spread the Gospel to the Spanish people. But Paul never made it to Spain. And when he eventually did travel to Rome, it was not the way he had originally expected.

According to the book of Acts, Paul was arrested in Judea and brought to Rome for trial. Later tradition says that Paul was beheaded in Rome, becoming a martyr for his faith. But before his execution, Paul lived in the city for two years under house arrest (Acts 28:16–31). He dwelt in rented accommodations, probably in a tenement apartment, where a guard stayed with him. He was allowed to have visitors, so the Christians in Rome could spend time with him in person. Many of the Roman Christians had been strangers to Paul when his letter arrived. But now these same people whom he had called “God's beloved” (Romans 1:7) could meet the apostle face to face and become his dear friends. 🌿

The Rev. Dr. Joy A. Schroeder, an ELCA pastor, teaches church history at Trinity Lutheran Seminary and Capital University, where she holds the Bergener Chair in Theology and Religion. She is the author of *Dinah's Lament: The Biblical Legacy of Sexual Violence in Christian Interpretation* (Fortress Press, 2007).



WE RECOMMEND

Resources for action, advocacy, programs, or further study

compiled from sources including ELCA News Service, Seeds for the Parish, and www.elca.org.

Lutherans can “Make It Simple”

To help people understand that they are not alone in this time of recession and to recognize God’s abundance, the ELCA has produced “Make It Simple,” a two-disc DVD resource that explores living more simply while offering an opportunity for people to learn to “live generously.” It includes downloadable stewardship materials and nine video segments that highlight the personal stories of Lutherans.

Each approach includes an introduction, leadership roles, calendar, sample materials and suggestions for using the video. There are specific materials for children and youth. “Make It Simple” is available through Augsburg Fortress (www.augsburgfortress.org) and the ELCA Web site (www.elca.org).

“The resource is designed to help people assess their wants and needs, reducing clutter and complexity in daily life,” said Keith Mundy, assistant director for stewardship, ELCA. “It’s about asking questions like, ‘Do we need that extra television, computer or car? How can we reduce our travel or time shopping?’ By discovering what enough is, we discover God’s abundance and the opportunity to share with others through our generosity.”

Learn more about ELCA global mission

A new quarterly newsletter that includes information about ELCA global missions is available online at www.elca.org/globalmission/support. The first newsletter provides such nuggets as how many

ELCA mission personnel there are (247), how many countries they serve (49), and the average annual cost of a single missionary’s training, salary, benefits, and in-country support (\$70,000). A new global mission blog on the site (<http://blogs.elca.org/handinhand>) offers posts by ELCA missionaries, churchwide staff, and other mission friends. View a six-minute video presentation, “A Day in the Life of a Missionary,” which shows glimpses into the work, joys, and challenges of nine ELCA missionaries.

Lutheran Disaster Response “e-report”

To help tell the story of its work in 2008, Lutheran Disaster Response (LDR) has made its annual report available online as an “e-report.” LDR is a collaborative ministry of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod. The report provides links to Web sites and videos featuring the stories of people and communities responding to natural disasters.

The Rev. Kevin A. Massey, LDR director, said making the annual report available online is “good stewardship. By eliminating printing and shipping costs, the total cost of this report is nearly 30 percent less than those of previous years. And more importantly, we hope that the annual report will be more accessible to a wider audience.”

LDR’s e-report provides a financial overview and resources to help people prepare for the event of a disaster.

LDR’s 2008 Annual Report is at www.ldr.org/annual_report.

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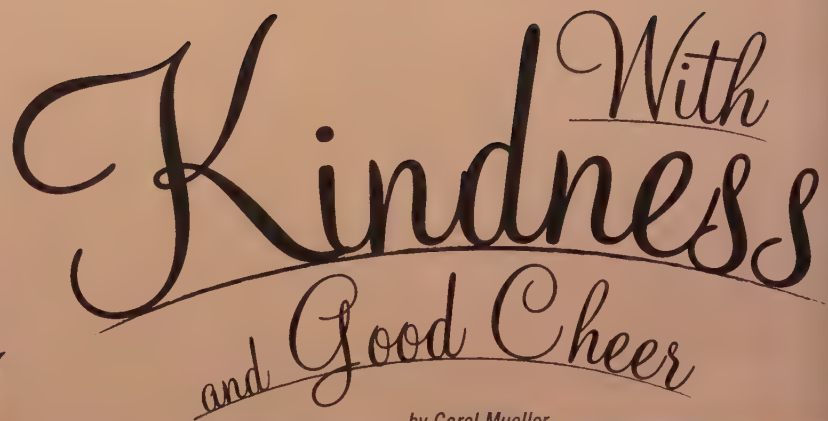


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The church was full, very full, almost the kind of full that comes with lilies, trumpets, and the triumphant strains of “Christ the Lord is Risen Today.” But it wasn’t Easter. It wasn’t Sunday morning, either. It was a Friday evening and there was no worship service. The gathering was for a meeting.

A large graphic of a house silhouette filled with names of people. The names are arranged to fit the shape of the house, with some names appearing multiple times. The names include: Charlotte, Mia, Anthony, Donna, Helen, Sarah, Regina, Sharon, Karen, Lisa, Sandra, Laura, Betty, Mary, Susan, Linda, Jason, Michelle, Patricia, Brenda, Julia, Claire, Ingrid, Emma, Emily, Isabelle, Thomas, Ella, Steven, Yvonne, Elizabeth, Christine, Rachel, Carol, Kimberly, Victoria, Theresa, Jessica, Maria, Katherine, Jennifer, Deborah, Nancy, Fane, Helsea, Alice, Denise, Margaret, Steven, Catherine, Steven, Yvonne, Elizabeth, Christine, Rachel, Carol, Kimberly, Victoria, Theresa, Jessica, Maria, Katherine.

What kind of meeting brings out Lutherans in such robust numbers? Certainly not the annual "All-in-favor-say-aye-all-opposed-nay-motion-is-carried," snoozer, in which a head count is sometimes needed to make sure there's a quorum.

No, the meeting that packs Lutheran pews is the kind that challenges the status quo. It's one that promises—or threatens—major change. It's a meeting like one held in my own ELCA congregation last year, a town hall meeting called to discuss extending a call to a gay pastor.

The previous Sunday we had met the pastor, a gay man who was celibate. Because of his celibacy, there were no synod prohibitions against calling him. In fact, he was recommended by our local synod but the final decision was up to us.

As I reflect on that evening, it occurs to me that my congregation is almost a microcosm of the wider church. The ELCA Churchwide Assembly gathered this August in Minneapolis. Among other things, they considered a social statement on human sexuality. Included in that debate is an important decision: Should the ELCA allow men and women in committed same-sex relationships to serve as ordained pastors? (Read more about ELCA social statements on page 26.)

It's a polarizing question. The issue of gay and lesbian clergy, celibate or not, stirs up strong feel-

ings. As the microphone was passed among members of my congregation, many stood up and spoke. Some were articulate in their support of gay clergy, a few were firm in their opposition. For or against the call, each person expressed his or her opinion and the reasons for it. I listened to the comments and mentally listed the points I wanted to make.

Then the microphone was passed to a good friend. I knew his views because he and his wife had discussed them with me, so I thought I was prepared for what he would say.

I wasn't. My friend began his remarks with six words that flabbergasted me: "I don't think this congregation wants . . ."

Whoa! How could he presume to know what the congregation wants? A tsunami of indignation flooded my brain, obliterating patience, tact, and whatever remarks I'd been considering. He was barely finished when my hand shot up in the air, waving urgently for the microphone.

I was on my feet in a nanosecond. "Joe, I don't think you or anyone else can speak for the congregation," I said. "Each one of us has to look into our heart and vote for what we think is right."

Though I meant what I said, I said more than I meant. Why did I call Joe by name? I didn't have to personalize it. What was I thinking?

A mutual friend told me later that Joe was hurt and felt that I had "scolded him in front of the whole church." I subsequently apologized for calling him out and our friendship survived.

Christians, Lutherans, old friends—even when we have faith and values in common, we cannot always agree on every issue. We can, however, respect one another's views, hear them out patiently, and respond without criticizing.

Sometimes we fall short. I was reminded of that meeting when I read Paul's letter to the Romans, with this exhortation to fellow Christians: "Encourage each other in the faith."

I don't think Paul is telling us to preach to each other or hand out smiley faces. I take his exhortation as a behavior check. Do we exemplify Christian love as we interact with our fellow believers? Do we practice kindness, patience, and generosity of spirit with other Christians? Do we offer TLC to the people in our own congregation or do we take them for granted?

What if we criticized people less and praised more? What if we expected less and contributed more? What if we complained less and thanked more?

What if we just lightened up, loosened up, and loved each other, warts and all? Would it become second nature? Very possibly.

Kindness and acceptance

Ask Marge Thorin about her congregational life at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church in Spokane Valley, Wash., and she doesn't mention the words kindness and acceptance. She doesn't have to; they are implicit in her stories.

"Our quilting group meets every Tuesday to make quilts for Lutheran World Relief and to share concerns and pray for one another," said Marge. "One of our members just had breast surgery and we've surrounded her with love and concern.

"Our church secretary often directs new people to the quilters. We're the unofficial welcoming committee for older women who may be alone."

One of those women came into the group from nowhere. She had no church connection, but the quilters reached out to her. "She was overwhelmed that we would treat her as one of us and care about her," Marge said.

"We come to the quilting group every week because we don't want to miss it. We're fabric junkies," she confessed with a laugh, "and old enough to be frugal and want to use every scrap."

For this lifelong seamstress and quilter, making a quilt is more difficult than it used to be. So are a lot of other things in her life, because for more than a decade Marge Thorin has been legally blind. She can no

longer drive, but lives close enough to church that she can walk.

Other problems are not so easily solved, but when her husband is not able to take her places, help is always at hand from fellow members of Good Shepherd. "Everybody is always so willing, so offering, recognizing your disability and accepting it," Marge said.

That acceptance extends to all members of the congregation.

Marge tells about a 16-year-old boy who is developmentally disabled. "He can be disruptive, but he's one of us," she said. "He comes to church every Sunday and he knows everybody's name and shakes hands with us."

The boy is being raised by his mother and grandmother, who is in her 90s, and Marge thinks it's important "how everyone has surrounded the grandma and mom with care and concern, whether we agree with their decisions about the boy or not."

Christian care and concern, I came to learn, are vital during the tough times life dishes out. After a failed back surgery, I spent four months on disability from work, unable to sit, drive a car, or do routine tasks. When my husband was at work, members of my congregation stepped in, bringing food, doing shopping, driving me to physical therapy, and simply visiting and praying with me.

Our minister of health came regularly and together we walked to the local ice cream shop for a milkshake. Exercise, sunshine, friendship, and fresh air: It was really good medicine. Scientists should study the therapeutic effects of chocolate shakes.

Humor and communication

When lifelong Lutherans Judy and Lee Mills moved three years ago from the suburbs of Chicago to the outskirts of Lancaster, Pa., it was a homecoming of sorts. Both are Pennsylvania natives, but they didn't return to their home town or home church.

Still, there was something awfully familiar about their new church, Lutheran Church of the Ascension, in Willow Street, Pa. That was the name of the church they had transferred from in Illinois, on Willow Road. They lived four miles from their Illinois church and moved into a home four miles from their new Pennsylvania church.

To top off the string of coincidences, Judy joined Lydia Circle, the name of the circle she had belonged to at her former church.

"I think we were meant to be here," she said with a chuckle, as she rattled off all the church-related coincidences. Active in her former church, Judy had no problem getting acquainted at "Ascension Pennsylvania," as she calls it. Lydia Circle

and Women of the ELCA were her point of entry. "We use the *Lutheran Woman Today* Bible study and we really like it," she said.

Judy also likes the good-humored atmosphere that prevails in her congregation. While members have differences of opinion, like all congregations, "There's a fair amount of levity, a lot of banter. You can't walk into church without smiling," she said. "It breaks a lot of tension."

She's even been the object of the humor. It stemmed from her commitment to Hurricane Katrina relief and several trips to Biloxi she'd made with her former congregation to help with rebuilding. She spoke to many in her new congregation about the trips and the need that is still there.

"I am conscious of saying 'This is how we did it at Ascension Illinois,'" Judy admitted.

One Sunday morning she got a public reminder of that habit. The pastor, in announcing a new congregational outreach initiative, said: "And here's this new member, Judy Mills, and I get so tired of hearing Biloxi, Biloxi, Biloxi . . ."

The upshot? Her pastor took a work trip to the Gulf Coast and returned with the same commitment to the region that Judy feels. "I think he's preached about it at least 10 times since he got back," she said.

Patience and potluck

What do you call a church that is the product of eight congregations put together?

No, not the octochurch. You call it United in Faith Lutheran Church, Chicago, and if you are charter member Laurel Kenneally, you remember in vivid detail how it was created.

"At that time it was the largest church merger in the synod," said Laurel, who lives in Northbrook, Ill. She originally belonged to Nebo Lutheran, one of eight small, struggling congregations that joined together 11 years ago to become one strong new church, the aptly named United in Faith.

The process wasn't easy. Those eight clusters of Chicago Lutherans overcame multiple challenges on the road to a successful merger. There were old church buildings to sell—an emotional process—a new site to find and acquire, and a getting-acquainted period for members that required time and patience.

"Issues were music and order of service, but one thing we all agreed on was that none of our current pastors could serve the new church," Laurel said.

A less tangible problem surfaced early and often in the form of a phrase she still repeats with a sigh: "We've always done it that way."

"We said, 'Forget that phrase!'" Laurel recalled. "A lot of people had

to come to terms with that." Each congregation lost a few people to the merger, but most supported it.

"Once a month we had a combined service at the various churches, and at first the congregations sat with each other," Laurel said. "One summer we held an outdoor worship service at a local park followed by a potluck. After all, we're Lutherans," she added with a smile.

Food, coffee, and Christian fellowship worked their magic. Friendships began to form and differences began to fade.

When the building committee finally settled on a site for the new church, they held an open house. "It was a vacant printing factory on the northwest side, not far from all eight churches, and the bus went right by it," said Laurel. "We sat there and looked at this big empty space and they presented a vision of the new church."

"But a lot of people said, 'This doesn't look like a church!' and we had to say over and over, 'What is the church? The church is the people.'"

Today, United in Faith still doesn't look like a church on the outside, but it's a beautiful sacred space inside. So are all of our churches, if only we remember Laurel's words. The church really is the people. 🌸

Carol Mueller belongs to an ELCA congregation in the Chicago suburbs.

BEING A PUBLIC CHURCH

by Leslie Weber

The ELCA addresses social issues in a variety of ways, but one of the most important is through its social teaching and policy documents: social statements, messages, and social policy resolutions. These are meant to assist ELCA members in communal and individual moral deliberation about social issues and in moral formation. They also set policy and guide the ELCA's advocacy and other work as a public church. Over the coming year, *Lutheran Woman Today* will run a series of articles describing and highlighting these important documents.

Social statements are developed by a representative task force over a four- to five-year period and require two-thirds approval by a Churchwide Assembly. Messages are based on social statements, speak to timely and more limited topics than social statements, and are approved by the ELCA Church Council. **Social policy resolutions** are actions by the ELCA Church Council or Churchwide Assembly on questions of immediate and focused concern. You can learn more at www.elca.org/socialstatements/procedures.

At this writing, the ELCA currently has nine social statements. The tenth, the proposed "Human

ELCA MESSAGES

- "AIDS and the Church's Ministry of Caring" (1989)
- "Israeli-Palestinian Conflict" (1989)
- "Changing Europe" (1990)
- "Homelessness" (1990)
- "End of Life Decisions" (1992)
- "Community Violence" (1994)
- "Sexuality: Some Common Convictions" (1996)
- "Immigration" (1998)
- "Suicide Prevention" (1999)
- "Commercial Sexual Exploitation" (2001)
- "Living in a Time of Terrorism" (2004)

Available online at www.elca.org/What-We-Believe/Social-Issues.aspx

Sexuality: Gift and Trust," comes before the Churchwide Assembly for a vote in August.

The ELCA's first social statement, "Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective," was approved in 1991. It explains the ELCA's understanding of what it means to be a public church.

OTHER RESOURCES

A new CD with all of the documents produced through 2007, a visual of the social statement development process, and other valuable tools for promoting discussion, is now available: "Addressing Social Issues Theologically: ELCA

Policy Documents and Resources (through 2007)."

Currently, three more social statements are in process—on genetics, criminal justice, and gender justice. As part of the preparation for a genetics social statement, the task force has produced a study document titled "Genetics and Faith: Power, Choice, and Responsibility" with an accompanying DVD, both available through Augsburg Fortress (800-328-4648).

In addition to these position statements, the ELCA demonstrates its desire to address social issues by fostering moral deliberation and producing study materials

ELCA SOCIAL STATEMENTS

Church in Society: A Lutheran Perspective" (1991)
 The Death Penalty" (1991)
 Abortion" (1991)
 Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice" (1993)
 Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture" (1993)
 For Peace in God's World" (1995)
 Sufficient, Sustainable Livelihood for All" (1999)
 Caring for Health: Our Shared Endeavor" (2003)
 Our Calling in Education" (2007)

These, along with "Human Sexuality," may all be accessed online at www.elca.org. Click on the "What We Believe" tab at the top of the page, then the "Social Issues" tab.


on other timely subjects. Several resources are available to facilitate these discussions:

Journal of Lutheran Ethics—now in its sixth year, this online journal features a new topic each month with previous issues archived;

"Talking Together as Christians about Tough Social Issues" sets forth a unique four-step, easy-to-understand process for discussing any moral dilemma;

"Talking Together as Christians Cross-Culturally" enables people of different cultural heritages to discuss difficult issues together.

The Studies Department in the ELCA Church in Society unit is the

source of these documents, and its staff stands ready to answer questions. You may call or e-mail Marilyn Campbell (773-380-2718; Marilyn.Campbell@elca.org) who can direct your question to the right person. Single, free copies of most of the mentioned documents are available in English and Spanish through the ELCA Church in Society resource line (800-638-3522, ext. 2996). Multiple copies are available through Augsburg Fortress by calling 800-328-4648. 

The Rev. Leslie Weber Jr. is the associate executive director in ELCA Church in Society.

Called to Witness in Society

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America concerns in witness to God's just and loving reign. Through faith in the Gospel, we participate in society in grateful response to God's love. Through faith in the Gospel, we participate in society in grateful response to God's love. Through faith in the Gospel, we participate in society in grateful response to God's love.



Policies and Procedures of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America for Addressing Social Concerns

The 1997 Churchwide Assembly acted in August 1997 to affirm the adoption by the Church Council of this document, as a revision of the former document, "Social Statements of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America: Principles and Procedures," which was adopted by the first Churchwide Assembly on August 28, 1989, and to authorize the Church Council to make appropriate adjustments in these policies and procedures as further experience would indicate. This version contains changes approved by the Church Council at its November 11-13, 2006, meeting.

Faithful participation in society is integral and vital to the mission of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA). As individual members and as a corporate body this church lives out the Christian faith in encounter with the concerns that shape life in God's creation. Social statements, messages, social policy resolutions, and studies of social issues are important means by which this church carries out its participation in society. This document is meant to clarify, order, and strengthen their role in the life and mission of this church. It revises an earlier document with the same name in order to bring these policies and procedures into accord with the changes in the governance structure of the churchwide organization enacted by the 2005 Churchwide Assembly.¹

This document presents four distinct yet interrelated spheres of activity that seek to form in this church new partnerships, practices, and capacities for discerning and doing God's will in the world. These four spheres are:

- 1) Equipping and Nurturing Members;
- 2) Encouraging Learning and Moral Discourse;
- 3) Developing and Enacting Social Policy; and
- 4) Interpreting and Applying Social Policy.

While each sphere of activity contains distinct initiatives, each sphere supports and relates to the others. The following sets forth this church's bases for addressing social concerns, describes the four spheres of activity, and outlines the procedures for each sphere.

There are print and DVD study guides to help congregations discuss the "Abortion," "For Peace in God's World," "Freed in Christ: Race, Ethnicity, and Culture," and "Our Calling in Education" social statements.



Be Mutually Encouraged

by Sarah Henrich

BIBLE STUDY

Theme Verse

Romans 1:16

"For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

Opening

Hymn

"I Love to Tell the Story," *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 661, verses 1 and 3

Prayer

Gracious God, you call your people together that we may deepen our faith in you and fervent love toward one another by studying your word. As we gather, give us ears to hear these ancient words from St. Paul to believers in Rome. Open our hearts and minds with your Holy Spirit that his words may still today strengthen our faith and help to shape our daily lives. Give us patience and good humor with one another and with our brother Paul, the more fully to appreciate the depth and power of your gift to us in Christ Jesus. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Ancient Letters

"Did we get any interesting mail?" "Anything for me?" "Did the mail come yet?" At our house, we're always

eager to see what came in the mail. Never mind that e-mail and cell phones make communication easy. We still look forward to the mail coming to our house, bringing who knows what exciting news.

In this year's Bible study, we will read some mail—St. Paul's letter to the followers of Jesus in Rome. We are blessed to have this letter from the apostle in our New Testament. It allows us a glimpse into those very earliest years as believers gathered into little groups all around the Mediterranean world. What did Paul write? What did he think was important for the Roman Christians to hear? How do we read mail addressed to others so long ago and find strength and guidance for our own time? These and many other questions will be part of our study and conversation as we come to know more deeply this most prized letter from Paul.

1. Let's start in our own world. Have you ever thought about how much information you get about a letter even before you open it? A long white envelope with a machine-printed address label suggests that there's something official inside. What are some other sizes, shapes, and colors of envelopes that come to your house? What do you expect to find inside?

In Paul's world, letters were the only way to communicate with people at a distance. Hand-written letters were essential to maintain friendships, express sympathy, carry on business, even introduce family members to one another. It is no surprise that the New Testament is full of letters. In fact, 21 of the 27 books in the New

Testament are letters, sometimes called epistles. Other New Testament writings quote letters (see, for example, Acts 15:23–29 and Revelation 2:9–11).

These letters are the oldest Christian writings we have. A generation before the Gospels were written, letters were circulated among the small communities of believers to strengthen their faith, help them understand what it meant to follow Jesus, and to build a network, a united body of believers. We can only imagine how precious these letters were as they came to a house church, were read aloud to the community, and then copied and the copies shared further.

2. Ancient letters, like our own today, were written according to clear patterns. Take a moment and fill in the chart below to remind yourself how the greeting in a letter conveys meaning and creates certain expectations.

few people in Paul's time could read; most people heard letters read aloud to them. Knowing this, most letter writers followed a familiar four-part pattern; this made it easier for listeners. Paul uses this pattern in his own letters, so it will be helpful for us to be familiar with it too.

- Greeting. Most letters began with the name of the writer followed by the names of the addressees and then a word of greeting.
- Thanksgiving or prayer for the health of recipients.
- Body of the letter. This section varied in length

and style, depending on the type of letter.

- Closing. This section might include travel plans and greetings to be shared from and with others.

Paul takes advantage of this pattern to strengthen his communications. There are two important ideas to keep in mind as you read Paul's letters.

- The ancients understood letters as a substitute for being there in person. Paul's letters represent the presence of Paul himself.
- Most people in Paul's day were not able to read or write. They would have *heard* these letters. The letters were written for the ear rather than for the eye.

If you have time, let's look at a short example before we turn to Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome. If not, feel free to skip ahead to "Paul's Letters."

3. Look at Paul's letter to Philemon using the chart on the next page. Read the greeting section. How do you think you would have felt if you had been in Philemon's house church and heard this section read aloud? Now read the thanksgiving section. What expectations might you have had upon hearing these words from Paul?

Paul's Letters

In the New Testament there are seven letters that scholars agree come from Paul himself: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians,

Opening	Kind of Letter	Expectation
Dear Mom,		
Mr. and Mrs. John Doe request the honor of your presence		
Dear Mrs. Smith:		
Hi Mary,		
Dear Sir or Madam:		

Section	Verses	Expectations
Greeting	1-3	
Thanksgiving	4-7	
Body	8-20	
Closing	21-26	

and Philemon. They are arranged in our Bibles beginning with the longest and ending with the shortest. Six of these letters, including Romans, are addressed to groups of believers in cities. The letter to Philemon is the only letter addressed primarily to an individual. Even the letter to Philemon, however, is not a private letter. There are other addressees, including the assembly that meets in Philemon's house.

Paul develops the standard parts of a letter to establish a tone and set an agenda. He makes especially good use of the Thanksgiving section of his letters to provide clues about the themes he will address. As listeners gathered to hear Paul's letter read, they did not have to wait long for a phrase or sentence that would help them see what Paul would focus on—and neither do we.

We begin with Paul's greeting, keeping in mind that Paul has not yet been to Rome. Belief in Jesus as

God's Christ (Greek for Messiah) had been carried to Rome by others. In the first six verses, Paul carefully identifies himself.

READ ROMANS 1:1-6. *Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God . . .*

4. What points does Paul make about himself? Pick out the words he applies to himself.

The word translated *servant* in most Bibles really means *slave* in the original Greek. Paul not only serves Jesus Christ, he literally belongs to him. Paul spends most of these initial verses talking about God and Jesus. The beginning of Romans is like a capsule version of Paul's creed—what Paul believes about God and about his own calling to bring all Gentiles, that is, non-Jewish people—to faith in Christ.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Scholars have worked hard to figure out when and where Paul wrote his letters, but there is no firm agreement about either date or location. The earliest letter was probably 1 Thessalonians, written in about the year 48.

The letter to the Romans is believed to have been written in the mid-50s. We do not know

how or when Christians arrived in the imperial city, but we do know that by the time Paul wrote, there were already many small groups of believers in Rome. (See "When in Rome," p. 16.)

There had been Jews in Rome for more than 200 years by the time Paul wrote. Among these Jews and their Gentile neighbors, some had come to believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah of God. It was to this mixed group

of Jewish and Gentile Christians that Paul directed his letter.

Many historians believe that it was a controversy among Jews about the new Christian ideas that led the Emperor Claudius to expel all Jews from Rome in the year 49 (see Acts 18:2). Paul wrote his letter after Claudius' death in the year 54, when many Jews, both those who believed in Jesus and those who did not, had returned to Rome and settled back into their lives.

READ ROMANS 1:7. *To all God's beloved in Rome, who are called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

This is a short and sweet greeting. Paul does not speak of the Romans as part of an assembly (he does not use the Greek word *ekklesia*, a gathering of people for meeting). No, the Romans are simply "all God's beloved." Paul is careful not to tread on anyone's toes, as he might have if he had named groups or households of believers he does not know well.

5. Have you ever had to write a letter or helped someone else write a letter to an unfamiliar person or institution? How did you present yourself in the best light? Why do you think it matters?

IF TIME PERMITS TWO MORE LETTERS

Turn to 1 Corinthians and Galatians. Find the greeting section. Read and compare them in discussion. Go on to the thanksgiving section in 1 Corinthians. It is missing in Galatians. What themes do you see raised in 1 Corinthians? How do you think the Galatians might have felt when their letter from Paul lacked a thanksgiving section?

Paul planted churches in cities. He did not stay long anywhere, but followed his call from one city to another. Why would such a busy man take the time to write such a long letter as Romans? He gives as many reasons. He wrote to seek the support—both spiritual and financial—of the Roman believers for his mission to Spain (Romans 15:22–24). He wrote also to recommend Phoebe, his co-worker (16:1) and possible donor, who

may have carried Paul's letter. Because Paul was seeking assistance from the Romans, he also wrote to introduce himself and explain his theology.

All these reasons were based on Paul's self-understanding as "apostle to the Gentiles" (11:13). He had a mission to take God's Good News in Jesus Christ to the Gentiles and create a people of faith (see 15:9–13 and 16:26).

However, his goal was not just

The Theme of the Letter to the Romans

In 1:8–15, the thanksgiving section of the letter to the Romans, we are drawn into Paul's theme. He tells the Romans how he has prayed to be with them for mutual encouragement of one another's faith. He longs to proclaim the gospel among them, a gospel that it is his special call to bring to Gentiles (1:5, 13). If you had been one of the Romans listening to this letter, your ears would certainly have pricked up by now. Paul has mentioned the "gospel of God" several times already: immediately in verse 1, again in verse 9 (where God's Son is brought into it), and yet again in verse 15. Our first question for Paul is, "What do you mean by that?"

He opens the body of the letter with his direct answer in verses 16 and 17.

¹⁶For I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. ¹⁷For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, "The one who is righteous will live by faith."

Even this answer needs some explanation. We will work on three main phrases. You may feel that this is a lot of work for only two verses, but please have

to bring individuals to belief in Jesus Christ—his goal was to create a people, one people. For that reason, he also wrote to stress how believers ought to live together (chapters 12–15) as a people in Christ. For Paul, a Jew deeply shaped by Scripture and God's promises, it was of paramount importance to show that God's promises were trustworthy, even though most Jews did not accept Jesus as the Messiah.

patience. These verses are crucial to understanding Paul's letter to the Romans.

- “Ashamed of the gospel.” With this phrase Paul uses his own Scriptures to help him express his confidence in God. The words *shame* and *ashamed* appear many times in the psalms and the prophets. Isaiah writes, “I know that I shall not be put to shame; [God] who vindicates me is near” (50:7–8). Paul makes clear that like those who announced God's presence and purposes in ages past, he too is bearing God's truth into his own time and place.
 - “The power of God for salvation.” Paul talks about the gospel as power. It is an event, a real invasion of ordinary life by Jesus' death and resurrection. It is a power that has changed creation forever and is of God's making.
 - “The righteousness of God is being revealed.” The idea of *God's righteousness* can be understood in three ways, all present at once. It can mean God's keeping of God's promises to Israel. It can also refer to God's justice in relation to the whole creation, including the Gentiles whom God created and wanted to redeem. Finally, God's righteousness is God's power and will to put things to rights. This will of God to make things right for all God's creatures is revealed, Paul says, in the powerful event of Jesus' death and resurrection. Paul spends much time in this letter explaining how this is, why it was necessary, and what it means for how humankind is called to live.
6. Have you ever been in a place or situation that needed to be put to rights? What was it? How did you feel when things were in order again? What do you imagine the world will be like when God has it fully put to rights?

If you have time, you might sketch a picture or create a collage that expresses your sense of everything put to rights.

All these thoughts are drawn together in verse 17. Paul uses a Greek word, *pistis*, often translated as *faith*. It can as well be translated *faithfulness* or *trust*. Paul's construction of this sentence is difficult to put into English, but a literal translation might be, “From faith/faithfulness/trust for faith/faithfulness/trust.” Paul helps us understand by quoting Habakkuk 2:4: “The righteous live by their faith” (or “by faithfulness”). This quotation caps our two verses, helping us understand what Paul means.

Yet even these words can have more than one meaning. Paul is almost poetic here. He reaches for language to express all that he wants to say about how God never gives up on God's people, and about Jesus, the Righteous One whose faithfulness to God brought humanity new life. At the same time, this quotation suggests that those who believe that God raised Jesus from the dead are called to trust God just as Jesus did.

IF TIME PERMITS TRANSLATIONS

Compare translations of Romans 1:17 in KJV, NIV, NRSV, and any other Bibles you might have on hand. How do the translations differ? Are you surprised by any of the translations? In what way?

Now you have gotten past the most difficult hurdle in reading the letter to the Romans—unpacking Paul's rich, poetic, compact language. Think of how hard it must have been for him to get his big ideas into a few memorable words. No wonder it is so demanding of us to hear him with understanding. But it is worth it.

So often we reach for words ourselves to express the deepest feelings and convictions we have, struggling to find the words and never feeling quite satisfied. Have you had the experience of looking at one card after

another in a store, rejecting this one as too silly, that one as too sentimental, searching and searching to find one that's just right?

Surely Paul reached out for familiar words to express his joy in God's costly faithfulness to God's own promises, his hope that God was bringing in a new day, a new creation. It is this that he wishes to proclaim to the Romans.

Discipleship: Gratitude and Listening

We have been given the gift of overhearing Paul's thoughtful and passionate attempt to express his trust in God's gracious gift of redemption and reconciliation to all people. We will also hear Paul's humble conviction that neither he nor any other person knows God's timetable or God's methods for gathering Jews, Gentiles, and all creation together.

As disciples of this same God, indeed, as part of the very body of Christ, we are called to lives like Paul's in two main ways. First, Christian life is marked by deep-rooted gratitude. Even in the hard times, our bottom line is gratitude for God's persistent presence in this creation. (See "Attitude of Gratitude," p. 10.)

7. How do you express yourself to God in prayer? Can you be truthful about what is happening in your life and how you feel about it?

A second mark of our lives as disciples is humble listening. Often when we listen patiently to someone trying to bring her ideas to speech, some small revelation can occur for us and for her. We can come to a better understanding of our sister or brother as a child of God. We may even see how God is at work in their lives. Now there would be a reason for gratitude. Listening for

God and living with gratitude weave together in our lives in amazing ways. (See "With Kindness and Good Cheer," p. 22.)

8. Can you think of a time you listened at length to someone and caught some glimpse of God at work? What were the circumstances? What did you learn?

9. What gets in the way of patient listening for you? What can you do to increase your ability to listen?

Closing Prayer

Gracious God,

Thank you for this time of patient listening to your word. Strengthen us to hear you through our sisters and brothers in daily life. Fill us with gratitude for your patience and mercy with us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Hymn

"Will You Come and Follow Me," *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 798, verse 1

Looking Ahead

In our next steps with Paul, we will hear him tell us why he believes that the world so desperately needed God's merciful rescue. Paul assures us of God's faithfulness even though all people have wandered away to serve other gods.

You may want to read Romans 2 and 3, especially 3:21–26, before the next session. Practice that patient listening with our beloved St. Paul! 🌸

The Rev. Sarah Henrich is professor of New Testament at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn.

Watch Sarah Henrich discuss this Bible study on video.

Go to www.lutheranwomantoday.org.

BEGINNING A NEW BIBLE STUDY

Our ancestors in faith believed that studying Scripture was not only a way to learn, but a way to be in the presence of God, a way to pray. As we gather for study, we thank God together.

PREPARATION

Tell people in advance that the group will pray together to rejoice in the gift of Bible study before the session begins. This ritual will take no more than five minutes.

Create a focal point in your meeting room by spreading a cloth on a table in the front or center of the room. On the cloth, place a candle, a glass bowl of water, a cross, and a Bible open to Paul's letter to the Romans. Have ready matches or a lighter.

You may also wish to place a few *LWT* subscription envelopes and promotional brochures, as well as Women of the ELCA individual partnership brochures, in a basket by the door so that participants may pick them up as they leave. (Call 800-638-3522, ext. 2730, to request materials.)

OPENING

SPEAKER 1: The Lord be with you.

ALL: **And also with you.**

SPEAKER 1: Jesus our Savior promised us that where two or three

are gathered in his name, he is here with us. (Light the candle.) Let this flame remind us of his presence in our hearts, in our words, in our Scriptures (touch the Bible), in our sacraments (touch the water), and in our gathering together.

ALL: **Amen.**

SPEAKER 2: God's inspired word in the Bible is ever ancient, ever new. Over the centuries, God's word has touched the hearts and souls of millions of people all over the world.

ALL: **We thank God together for God's great gift.**

SPEAKER 1: Our ancestors in faith saw study of God's inspired word in the Bible as a way to be in God's presence; they saw study of Scripture as a way to pray.

ALL: **We thank God together for God's great gift.**

SPEAKER 2: Lutheran women have gathered to study the Bible together for generations. This rich tradition is a great gift to the church.

ALL: **We thank God together for God's great gift.**

SPEAKER 2: As we gather today, we know that we are united with Lutheran women all over the country in studying this same text.

ALL: **We thank God together for God's great gift.**

SPEAKER 1: Our Lord told us to go out and preach the Good News to all people. Our studying Scripture together empowers us to do that.

ALL: **We thank God together for God's great gift.**

Pause

SPEAKER 1: Each one of us knows at least one woman who would rejoice in being welcomed to study the Bible in community.

SPEAKER 2: Each one of us knows at least one woman who would rejoice in being welcomed to our community of women.

ALL: **We ask God, what shall we do? How shall we take action?**

Pause

SPEAKER 2: Let us pray.

Blessed Lord, you bring us together in community around your holy Bible. We offer thanks and ask your blessing on all the women who gather to feast upon your word through this Bible study. Now inspire us, we pray, to generosity in sharing your many great gifts, so that we may be mutually encouraged by one other's faith. In the name of Jesus our Savior, we pray. Amen.

ALL: **Amen.**

A TRULY SPONTANEOUS
CONVERSATION...

HELLO?
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book of faith

Open Scripture. Join the Conversation.



HEALTH WISE

Help for Hair Loss

by Molly M. Ginty

It all started with one small spot for Maureen McGettigan.

"When I was 16 and working as a hair model for a local salon, a hairdresser noticed a quarter-sized bald patch on the back of my head," says McGettigan, of Flourtown, Pa. "When I saw it, I wondered how something so strange could ever happen to me."

As the years progressed, it happened more and more. Bald patches spread through McGettigan's auburn locks, and by age 24, she'd lost most of the hair on her head—along with her eyelashes and eyebrows. To avoid strangers' stares, she started wearing a wig and had fake eyebrows tattooed on her skin.

McGettigan was diagnosed with *alopecia areata*, an autoimmune disorder that causes hair loss and affects about 2 percent of the population. But while her condition is rare, the shame and embarrassment it causes are not. Roughly half of women suffer from hair loss at some stage of life, reports the American Academy of Dermatology.

"Our surveys show that when asked whether they would rather have more hair, more money, or more friends, 64 percent of women chose more hair," says Dr. William M. Parsley, president of the International Society of Hair Restoration Surgery.

While losing up to eight hairs with a single stroke of your brush is normal, dropping more than 100 strands a day could signal *alopecia areata*, anemia, a hormonal imbalance, or other underlying health problems. How can you tell

when hair loss (*alopecia*) signals serious trouble? And what are your best bets for treating it? During September or Alopecia Awareness Month, here's help.

Hair is its lushest from puberty through our 20s, and continues to thrive afterward on a protein- and iron-rich diet. Healthy hair grows at the rate of about half an inch per month, with each of the 100,000 strands on the scalp going through a growth phase (*anagen*, lasting two to three years); a resting stage (*catagen*, taking three to four months); and a shedding phase (*telogen*, when the strand falls out and a new one sprouts).

When this growth cycle is disrupted, several types of hair loss can occur:

Female pattern baldness (*androgenic alopecia*) affects a third of women and is usually permanent, with hair thinning on the front, sides, and crown of the scalp. A genetic predisposition can sometimes trigger it, as can hormonal shifts related to ovarian cysts, pregnancy, taking birth control pills, and entering menopause (when androgenic or "male" hormones, which women have in trace amounts, become more predominant as estrogen wanes).

Telogen effluvium is temporary hair loss caused by trauma (such as childbirth, physical illness, or emotional upset) that disrupts hair's normal growth cycle. Up to 30 percent of hairs prematurely enter the shedding phase. Thinning is overall and can occur between six weeks and six months of the triggering event.

Traction alopecia is localized and caused by tight hairstyles: braiding

This ongoing column is part of the Women of the ELCA health initiative, Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls. Visit www.womenoftheelca.org for more information.

snarrows, extensions, or taut ponytails that cause only temporary damage if addressed early.

Though strand shedding can be alarming, quick fixes often stop the fallout. Simply easing up on your ponytail holder—or getting your diabetes or thyroid problem under control—can kick-start growth. You can switch to new medications instead of using ones known to cause hair loss (certain drugs for arthritis, depression, heart disease, and high blood pressure). You can try low-androgen index birth control pills (such as Desogen or Ortho-Cept) instead of high-androgen index ones (such as Nival or Loestrin 1/20).

If hair loss continues, your doctor may recommend heavier-duty help:

Rogaine (minoxidil) is a drug approved by the Food and Drug Administration to treat androgenic alopecia in women at a concentration of 2 percent (though some doctors will prescribe it at 5 percent, the same concentration used for men).

Other hair loss drugs include steroid injections or creams, drugs to inhibit your body's production of male hormones, potassium-sparing diuretics, and histamine blockers.

Hair transplant surgery involves taking tiny hair follicle plugs from the nape of the neck or the back of the head (where their removal may go unnoticed) and implanting them in bald or thinning areas. Surgery costs \$3,000 to \$8,000 and is rarely covered by insurance.

Still thinning on top? Joining a hair loss support group can bring emotional

relief (as it did for McGettigan, who found one through the National Areata Alopecia Foundation).

There are grooming tricks that can maximize your mane. To build volume, you can part your hair on a different side or blow-dry your hair with your head flipped upside down. To minimize the contrast between your scalp and thinning hair, you can color your hair to better match your skin tone (lightening it if you're fair-skinned and darkening it

For more information:

American Academy of Dermatology

www.aad.org

American Hair Loss Association

www.americanhairloss.org

National Alopecia Areata Foundation

www.naaf.org



if you have a dark complexion). “Also of great help are hair extensions and wigs,” says McGettigan, who wears a custom-made auburn wig every day. “Mine is so convincing that strangers no longer notice my hair loss and could easily mistake me for the hair model I was more than 30 years ago.” 🌸

Molly M. Ginty lives in New York. Her work has appeared in *Ms.*, *Marie Claire*, *Redbook*, and *Women's eNews*.

Offerings of Letters 2009

by Kimberly Burge

In northwest Nicaragua, about an hour's drive from the Honduran border, the country's tallest volcano, Volcán San Cristóbal, rises nearly 6,000 feet to form a perfect cone. At the volcano's base lie the pasturelands of another force of nature, rancher Nubia Baca.

Nubia now owns 60 dairy cattle. But two years ago, after her husband died, she didn't know if she would be able to keep the land, much less run the farm.

"My husband didn't really think you needed to invest in the farm," Nubia recalls. "He believed in the traditional ways, that cows could eat whatever's growing on the land."

That meant the cows ate mainly the scrubby underbrush. Now a vast field of alfalfa, tall and blooming with golden flowers, has replaced that growth. Nearby are Cameroon grass and sugar cane. The blend of proteins and carbohydrates in this diet is far more nutritious for the cows. Nubia's cows are producing more milk than ever.

She learned how to produce healthier food for her cattle from agricultural trainers working for

Cuenta Reto del Milenio, Nicaragua's arm of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC). The MCC is a relatively new U.S. development assistance program. Bread for the World members worked to establish the program through its 2003 Offering of Letters.

Collective Christian voice

Bread for the World is a collective Christian voice urging U.S. decision-makers to end hunger at home and abroad. It is a primary partner in the advocacy work of ELCA World Hunger. Contributions to ELCA World Hunger support Bread for the World in its efforts to engage members, congregations, and other organizations in advocacy.

Even during difficult economic times, Americans can make a big difference for families in poor countries—especially when we make the most of our resources. In 2009, Bread for the World's Offering of Letters is calling on Congress to rework foreign assistance to make it more effective in reducing poverty.

By changing policies, programs, and conditions that allow hunger and poverty to persist, orga-

nizations such as Bread for the World provide help far beyond the communities in which we live. ELCA World Hunger also engages in public policy advocacy through the ELCA's Washington office, state public policy offices, corporate social responsibility office, and the Lutheran Office of World Community.

Real people, real stories

Advocacy helps real people with real stories—people like Nubia Baca. With multiple-year agreements, the MCC intends to provide a steady source of funding for countries committed to good governance, economic freedom, and investments in people. This differs from other U.S. aid programs, which can only commit funding for one year at a time.

In addition to training, Cuenta has provided Nubia with 30 percent of the funding she needed to run her dairy farm for the past two years. She learned about the program through her involvement with Consejo de Mujeres (Council of Women), a local collection of women's groups. As the MCC first explored what needed to be done in Nicaragua, they got input from the area's women. Their feedback led to significant improvements in the project.

Nubia learned quickly. As her cows' milk production increased,

ne realized she could earn more she used some of the milk to make cheese and *leche agria* (similar to sour cream). So Cuenta helped her purchase large canisters and a refrigerator for her house, where her cheese-making venture is centered. From 50 liters of milk, she gets about 30 pounds of cheese. In the rainy season, her cows can produce 1,000 liters of milk every day.

Everyone in the community now knows that Nubia sells dairy products from her home. Some days the line stretches all the way down the block. She's also providing employment for others. Six men work for her at the farm; three women help with the cheese-making.

While she's proud of her work, she wishes she'd discovered the possibilities earlier. Both her children have left Nicaragua to live in other countries—they believed that the lack of jobs meant they couldn't afford to stay and raise families there.

How we can help

The 2009 Bread for the World Offering of Letters urges Congress and President Barack Obama to develop a strategy for global development, with coordination at the highest levels of government. U.S. food, trade, migration, energy, and environmental policies should work in concert to promote sustainable development that reduces poverty.

What is an Offering of Letters? Members of a congregation or church group write letters to Congress in support of hunger-fighting legislation. Some churches place the letters in the offering plate at worship, dedicating the letters to God and saying special prayers for hungry and poor people.

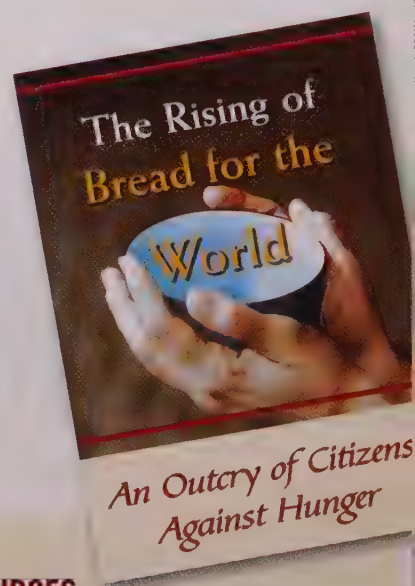
Sometimes Sunday school classes or youth groups or women's groups write to their senators and representatives asking them to support legislation that would help families in need in the United States and abroad.

This year's Offering of Letters seeks to make foreign assistance even more effective to help many more women like Nubia, and men and children as well. Promoting development means supporting the efforts of poor people to lift themselves out of poverty. But too often, development goals are intermingled with higher-profile political and military priorities, diluting the impact of foreign aid. Congress should ensure that poverty reduction is a primary goal of U.S. foreign assistance.

Bread for the World has a 2009 Offering of Letters Web site at www.bread.org/OL2009. The site offers updates, stories, and resources to help illustrate what we're working to achieve and why. Everything you need to speak out for hungry people is available right from your computer.

As Christians, we know that peace is more than the absence of war. It requires building strong, healthy relationships, supporting people and communities that are working to provide a better life for their children. That's the work of U.S. foreign assistance and the goal of global development. That's our opportunity and our challenge. 🌿

Kimberly Burge is senior editor and writer at Bread for the World.



RESOURCES

- > To learn more about ELCA World Hunger and its partners, go to www.elca.org/hunger
- > To learn more about Bread for the World's Offering of Letters, go to www.bread.org/OL2009
- > A book has just been published about the launching of Bread for the World: *The Rising of Bread for the World: An Outcry of Citizens Against Hunger* by Arthur Simon (Paulist Press). Go to www.paulistpress.com to learn more.



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RACE NOTES

A Community of Women

Linda Post Bushkofsky



As I travel throughout

the organization, the question people ask me most is, "How can we involve younger women?" What younger means varies from place to place. As one woman told me with a smile, "I'm 75. Anyone younger than me is a younger woman!" Whether you are thinking of women in their 40s and 50s, or those in their 20s and 30s, my first question is this: Why?

Some will answer: "The women in my congregational unit provide such important support to one another, helping each other through good times and bad. I want others to experience this."

Others might respond: "The youngest woman in our group is 55. We miss so much by not having younger women among us. What's it like to be a young woman of faith today? We would be enriched by their presence and we might have a thing or two to share with them from our experience."

Others, unfortunately, will answer: "We're tired. It's time somebody else stepped up and took the lead." And what some mean by *taking the lead* is doing things as they've always been done.

If you resonate most with this last answer, then I pray God blesses you and your fading unit. Not many new women will be joining you.

But if your answers are more like the first two, read on.

Our starting place is in the opening clause of our Purpose Statement. We are a "community of women." What does that mean? People in community care for one another, support each other, talk

with each other. How do we involve younger women? We begin by inviting them into community.

Strike up a conversation with a younger woman after church next Sunday. Once you're talking together, be attentive and listen. Invite her for coffee or lunch some time. It may take a few conversations before you even mention Women of the ELCA.

Perhaps you'll see an article in this magazine that connects with a conversation you've had. In that case, you can give her your copy to read. Suggest that she check out our Web site (www.womenoftheelca.org) to learn more about us.

Meanwhile, those of us already in congregational units must prepare ourselves. Let us pray for a spirit of openness to new ideas. How welcoming are our meeting times and locations? Can we replace "We've always done it this way" with "Do we need to do this? If so, what's the best way?" You might ask our Director for Membership Eva Yeo (Eva.Yeo@elca.org, 800-638-3522, ext. 2450) for ideas about ways to strengthen your group or develop a whole new model. She can also tell you how women can become individual partners of Women of the ELCA.

Let's be willing to accept the inevitable messiness that comes with new ideas, acknowledge the stress that some might feel, and find a way to manage that stress. How do we involve younger women? By being in community together. 🌸

Linda Post Bushkofsky is executive director, Women of the ELCA.



AMEN!

One People

by Catherine Malotky

God, you created us

with amazing variety. Our physical differences are just a glimpse of your imagination at work. Then there are the internal differences in the way we interpret the world—what we value, what drives us, how we interact with others. At our best, we can welcome our differences with a sense of discovery and delight.

But it's not easy to be together and different at the same time. You, God, have the capacity to appreciate each of us and what we bring. You created us with intention and gave us to each other. You also call us to faith in your vision of goodness and hope. You gave us baptism to welcome and a holy meal to nourish.

Yet being one people is hard over the long haul, particularly with those whose style or point of view or values differ from our own. Particularly when our differences have a history. Particularly when our histories have been closely held as a matter of faith. Paul called the Romans to transcend their traditional understandings of Jew and Gentile. Where once they saw each other as unclean, Paul proposed that in Christ they were one people, sisters and brothers. Centuries later, Martin Luther preached that our one unwavering commonality is Jesus Christ. All else, he said, we could argue about.

Is Jesus enough to make us one? Our history might suggest otherwise. Think of how much energy we put toward distinguishing ourselves. For many of our grandparents, it was language and culture. The Swedish Lutherans and the

Norwegian Lutherans and the Danish Lutherans and the German Lutherans and the Finnish Lutherans and who knows how many other Lutherans. Now we wonder about whether we are progressive or evangelical, or how we interpret the Bible, or where we stand on the social issues of the day. We have quite the capacity to separate ourselves from each other.

Sometime, I suppose, that is a good thing. It's possible that what nurtures the faith of one person will dampen the faith of another. You, God, are resilient enough to manage our varying interpretations of you! Finally, the point is that we come to know and trust you.

Because what we need more than anything is to belong to you. We need to know that your largess is our bounty and that your love is ours to rely on and that when everything else may seem to separate us from each other, nothing can separate us from you. From that place of wholeness, we can see each other in a new light.

So what more could make us one people? What would be more reliable than you, God? Not an idea. Not a value. Not a creed, but a person: Jesus. His love for all was more than we could bear. Yet that love, for which he was killed, is ours in full measure. About all else we can argue, but this we share. God's love in Jesus makes us one. 🌿

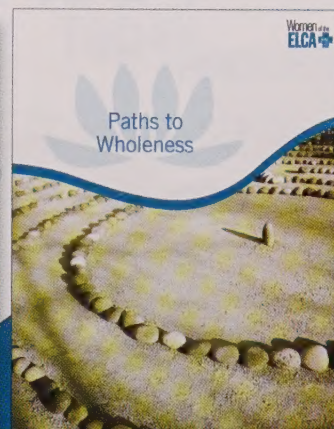
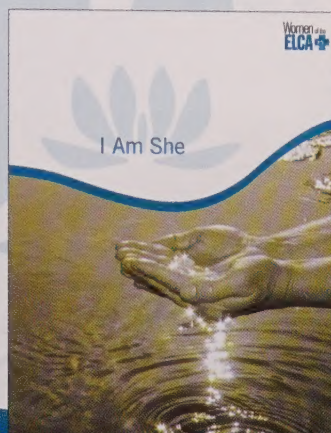
The Rev. Catherine Malotky serves the ELCA Board of Pensions as retirement planning manager. An ordained pastor, she has also been an editor, teacher, parish pastor, and retreat leader.

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